

EL DORADO

JOHN ROBERTS

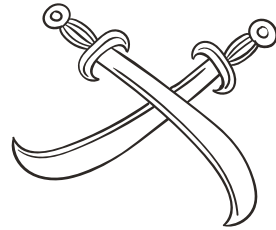
ILLUSTRATIONS BY
NERDIESID



The Challenge	3
Pirates of the Caribbean	6
Amazon Adventures	10
Captured	14
The City of Gold	17



The Challenge



In a tavern, private room, Cadiz, Spain. 1506

The room was dimly lit: only one candle burned and it was half its original height. Wax formed around the candle stand placed in the middle of a dirty, wooden table. Two of the world's greatest explorers, Luis Jimenez and Solomon Clegg, stared at each other. No one else was in the room. It was a hot evening but all the windows were closed. This meeting was private. The conversation had to be secret. As secret as the two identical maps they slowly unrolled onto the table in front of them.

"Gosh," muttered Clegg. "Mmmm," growled Jimenez in a Spanish accent.

This was all that was said for at least half an hour. Perhaps they were in shock. Perhaps



they were checking the maps really were identical. No one knew except for Clegg and Jimenez and they weren't telling.

These were maps to change a life, to change a country, to change the world! Only two people knew about them and they were staring at each other right now, right now across the old wooden table with its scratches, smears and stories. Someone had to break the silence, someone had to say something.

"Splatter me with rat vomit and leave me for the buzzards," said Clegg, "I'm transfloxed!"

Jimenez, who was clearly not amused, made low growling noises like a wild dog. His dark eyes seemed to darken further as he looked at the map again. "Oro," he whispered, rubbing his hands greedily. "¡Estupendo!"

Silence descended again. The candle was nearly burnt out. The room seemed hotter, the air thicker. Sweat drops plopped from Solomon's beard onto the table. Luis moved his map closer to him. Solomon looked at his letter again. Christopher Columbus' handwriting was thin and spidery but the message was strong and clear.

This is what he wrote.



Valladolid, Spain.

20th day of May in the year of Our Lord 1506.

Dear Solomon and Luis,

My old comrades, I am dying. I won't see the morning, of that I am sure. I have lived a full, exciting life and have enjoyed many amazing, unbelievable opportunities. I discovered the other side of our great planet. Crossing gigantic oceans, I found the Americas, its people and, most importantly, its riches! Yet there is one mystery I failed to solve. Haunting me, even as I write, it will be the dream I sail into the next world with.

There is a city made entirely of gold! A place known as El Dorado, where no European has ever set foot. Stranded on the island of Jamaica with my ship "Capitana", I was told of its existence by leaders of the local tribe. Everything in El Dorado is made of gold. Everything - the houses, roads, temples, tables, flowers - is all made of solid gold. The natives of El Dorado have boatloads of it so you can take away as much gold as you can carry. I am certain that this map will lead you to the treasure. I am sending you both a copy of the map I made in the Caribbean. Keep it safe because it could lead to a fortune beyond your wildest dreams.

This is what I want you to do. Meet in secret. Take no one with you. Along with your letter you both have the map which is sealed. Do not open them until you are together. The map shows in detail the land known as Colombia, named after me. Deep in this land, you will find El Dorado. It is difficult to get to. There are dangers to face whatever direction you choose. If you travel from the north, you will be faced with the most notorious and dastardly pirates in the world before setting foot on a land full of its own dangers. If you travel from the south, you will have to tackle the gigantic Amazon River, its gargantuan rain forest and deadly creatures. The rules are that one of you must approach from the north and the other from the south. Whoever gets there first gets all the gold they can lay their hands on. The man who gets to El Dorado second gets no gold and must never return. Be warned: Follow these rules or else I will seek my vengeance in the next life!

God speed and buena suerte my friends,

Christopher Columbus.



“So, we must decide who travels from the north and who arrives from the south. Don’t even think about offering to go halves on the loot,” said Luis in perfect English with a Spanish accent. “This gold will be mine, all mine!”

“Wow! You must have read my mind. Perhaps we could have a quiz then? Winner chooses their preferred route?” suggested Solomon. Luis glared at him as if he was ready to pounce. Solomon puffed out his chest, “Or throw knives at each other and see who gets closest?” Luis glared at him again, this time so hard that Solomon almost flinched! “Always worked for me,” said Solomon quietly, “apart from when I sliced off my first mate’s ear. Gave him the week off and his ear to the ship’s cat.”

Luis took two dice from his jacket pocket. He shook them and rolled them across the table toward Solomon. The dice said eleven. “Highest score has first choice,” he sneered.

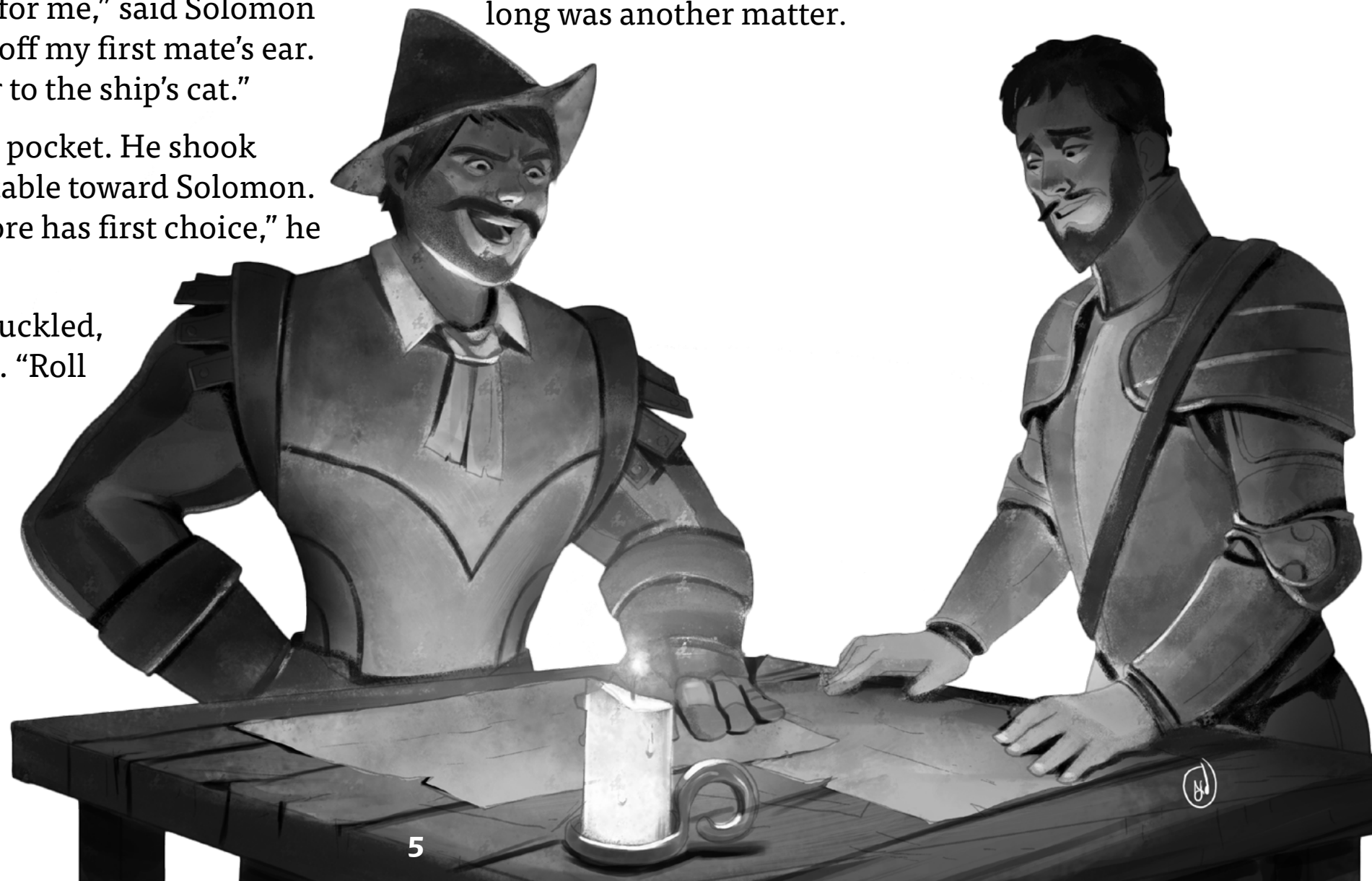
“Eleven! That’s odd!” Solomon chuckled, but Luis was in no mood for jokes. “Roll the dice, hombre,” he said.

Solomon held the small, worn dice and rattled them in both his strong, battle-scarred hands. Throwing them, he closed his eyes. The first showed a six. The second one spun on one corner

and then another and then spun and spun again before landing and revealing.....

“Two sixes! Golly gosh!” said Solomon Clegg, his eyes now open wide. “Lucky old me! I select the north. I’ll chance my arm with the sea and the pirates. Shake hands my old compadre and may the best hombre win,” Solomon grinned, pleased at his knowledge of Spanish. Luis smiled too, the sort of smile that said, “I know something you don’t know and if you did know what I know, you would not want to know, you know?”

They parted as friends. Whether they stayed friends for long was another matter.



Pirates of the Caribbean

Captain's log, Solomon Clegg, The Jolly Flobber

Day 28

This is taking far longer than I expected. We've been stuck in the doldrums for almost a week. No wind, no waves. My crew, The Jolly Flobbers, are a ragged, disheveled bunch with an unusual, slightly unpleasant smell. We had a morris dance to cheer ourselves up. What a whizzpiper! We danced to Birmingham Bert's accordion (shame about his wooden leg, he was such a marvellous mover) and waved our hankies high above our heads. Doncaster Dave, who would forget his head if it was loose, had forgotten his so he waved two pairs of my dirty underpants. Luckily, he didn't have to blow his nose!



Day 29

Slamzookle! We're moving at quite some speed now. Our one-eyed navigator, Aberdeen Angus, is jumping around the top deck as if his kilt were on fire. He's totally barking mad! He's yelling in his Scottish accent, "Shoreline birds!" That means we'll see land soon. Clever old Angus: we can always rely on him. He found the way wearing an eyepatch. Full blindfold next time, I say!

Day 30

We have an even happier ship today! Around midday, Welsh Walter hollered 'Land ahoy', from the crow's nest. Excited, astounded, fascinated, we watched as islands seemed to appear from nowhere, like sandy jewels floating in a bright blue

sea. We can get fresh water now instead of this green soup we've been drinking from the barrels. Maybe we'll even find some of those exotic fruits Columbus often talked about. Anything would be better than Irish Ian's potato stew.

Day 31

Anchored in a bay, we sent a small boat to shore to fetch water and bananas. Bananas are amazing: they are bright yellow and so easy to chew. Liverpool Larry was delighted as he has no teeth. I'm pleased for the old boy but I must confess I can hardly understand a word he says! Another ship sailed close by and waved cheerfully. They seemed like a friendly bunch. What spiffing red beards the crew had!

Solomon's idea of friendly was soon questioned with a capital Q. Night-watchman Newcastle Nick broke the gentle, peaceful Caribbean silence with a lusty, ear-busting 'AAAAGGGGHHHH!' One of his tattooed arms had been chopped off by the sharp blade of Billy Barbarossa, the red-bearded, notorious and rather grizzly chief pirate of the Caribbean. His entire bloodthirsty crew, who were notorious in these parts, were boarding the Jolly Flobber! Solomon Clegg and his men dressed quickly, armed themselves to the teeth and ran up to the top deck to repel the pirate invasion.

"Get the lily-livered dung munchers! Into the drink with the lot of them!" roared Solomon.

Screams filled the air as cutlasses cut and daggers dagged. Teeth left mouths, fingers took flight and pirate followed pirate, legs and arms thrashing wildly, into the ever reddening water.

"Keep this up Flobbers, we have them on the run," yelled Solomon Clegg with great delight.

Suddenly, above the din, red-bearded Billy Barbarossa thundered, "No more!" Instantly, everyone spun to face him. Silence. He dropped his sword with a loud CLANG! Barbarossa's pirates, (well, what was left of them) did the same.

"Kill these men" shouted Aberdeen Angus. "This man with the red beard is one of the Barbarossa brothers. They are bad men, slave traders. They capture Africans and sell them to the highest bidder".

"That may be so my Scottish chum," Solomon countered calmly, "but we are the Jolly Flobbers. We have manners and dance with hankies. We will spare them as long as they apologise and promise never to do it again."



Taking off his bag, which was hung around his broad shoulders, Barbarossa produced a bottle. He dragged the filthy, broken cork from its neck with his yellow, crooked teeth. As a peace offering, he offered the bottle to Solomon who politely drank.

“Sorry,” said Billy Barbarossa with a sly grin, crossing his fingers behind his back. “We won’t do it again”.

Barbarossa signalled to Solomon to pass the bottle around the rest of his crew. They shared the kind offering until there wasn’t a single drop left.

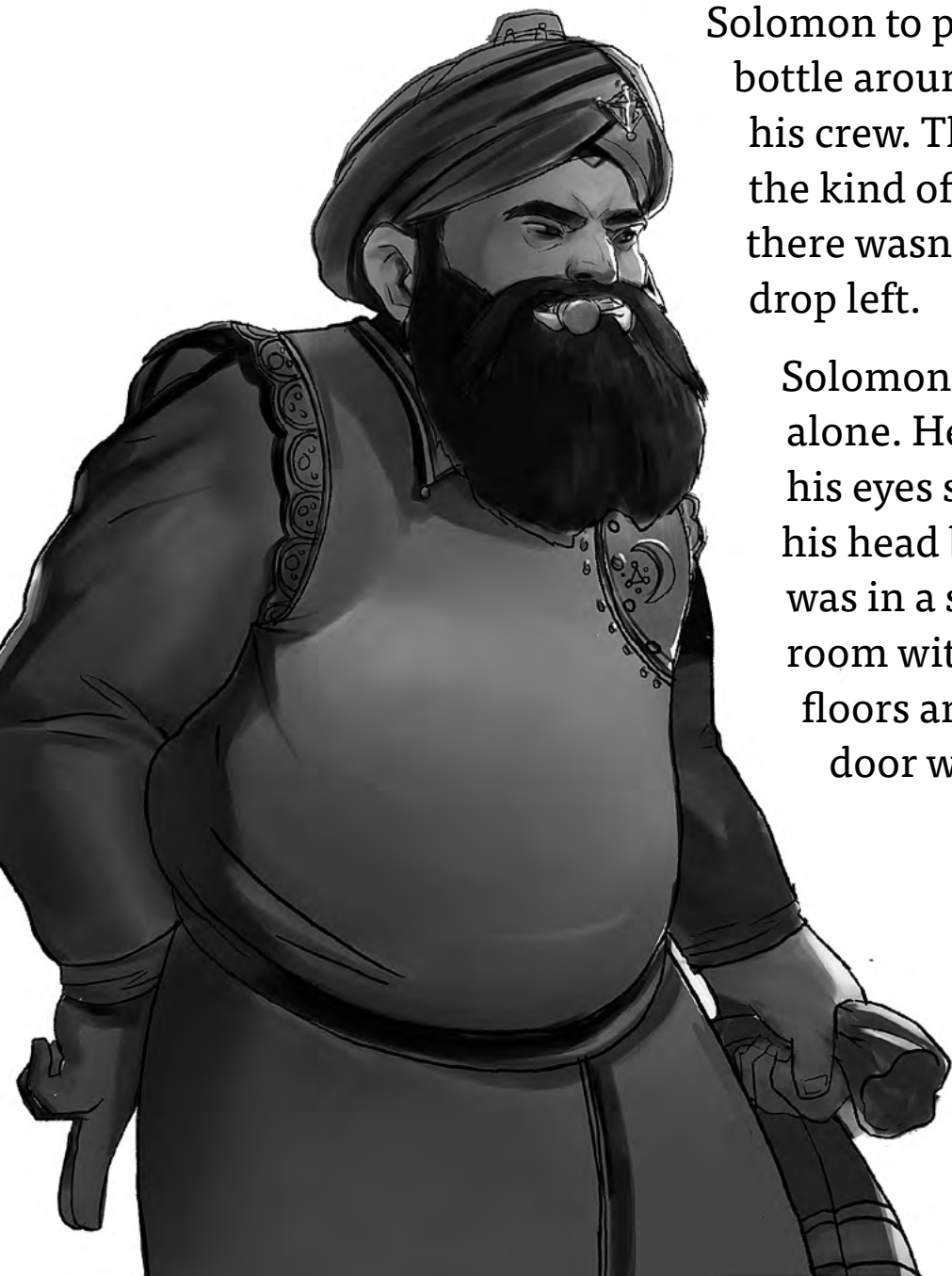
Solomon Clegg woke alone. He felt rough: his eyes smarted and his head banged. He was in a small dark room with wooden floors and walls. The door was locked.

The faintest of lights crept through a tiny window. Squinting, he could just about make out.....water and land. He was a prisoner in a strange ship docked in a bay.

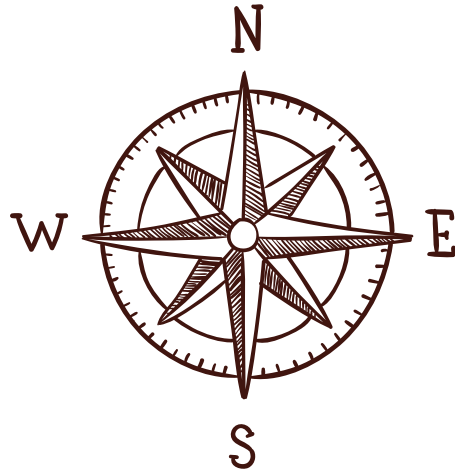
“Barbarossa!” he croaked, his mouth as dry as a dead rat in the desert.

“What a rum-soaked, flea-bitten, scurvy-infested rogue! I must get out of this hell hole.” He reached into his secret pocket and, to his relief, found the precious map that would lead him to the lost city of gold.

“My adventure has only just begun. I must escape and be the first to reach El Dorado... or die trying!”



Amazon Adventures



Finding El Dorado from the south would be no morris dance. Luis Jimenez would have to cross the immense Atlantic Ocean and sail up the raging Amazon river, a river longer than all the rivers in Europe, even if they were stitched together! Then he would have to somehow survive the relentless rainforest, a rainforest with trees ten times the height of a giraffe standing on a goalpost! Rolling eleven had been a terrible slice of luck.

Unlike Solomon Clegg and his Jolly Flobbers, Luis preferred to work alone. However, to cross the Atlantic, he needed a crew. He gathered a gang of mealy-mouthed mercenaries; expert sailors you could trust

only as far as you could throw them. Luckily, Luis could throw a man a long way. He wouldn't tell them about El Dorado. He'd tell them it was a bog-standard treasure hunt, lose them in the rainforest and keep all the gold for himself. If he kept his head about him, if the map was accurate, if all went according to plan, then Jimenez would be a very happy man indeed.

Getting ready to set sail on the evening's high tide, his heart began to beat as though it might burst through his chest. Excited, worried, determined, Luis finally left the the Spanish port of Cadiz. Adventures still made him feel that way, even after years of dangerous escapades on both sea and land. At least he had his secret weapon...

Before departing, departing on his quest, Luis had been to see his friend, the King of Spain. Columbus, who wanted to thank the king for funding his first trip to the new world, had given him an entire tribe that he had captured in the Americas some years earlier. Luis asked to borrow one of them. The King graciously agreed. Luis knew he had the bravery, strength and bloody-mindedness to win the race, but now he had Baniva too.

Baniva, a girl of around 18 years

of age, tall and dark haired, smiled at Luis. He had told her he was returning her to her home. Luis never had a problem with bending the truth. He knew that Baniva was the key to him conquering the rainforest and reaching the city of gold first. He wasn't about to let the truth get in the way of that.

"You've lost already, Solomon," growled Luis, gripping the pocket that held the all-important map.

Exactly one month later, map in hand, Luis was laughing with relief. He had made it to the Amazon River and he couldn't even see the riverbanks! The river was enormous: it was at least 300 kilometres wide at one point! There was nothing to worry about here. It was just like sailing the seven seas, that was until the river became surrounded by a great rainforest - massive, enormous, gigantic and imposing - towering over them like an impenetrable army of green giants.

As the river narrowed and with the forest almost in touching distance, Luis found a place to anchor his ship and leave his crew. He packed a bag full of provisions, helped his secret weapon from the ship and turned to the confused faces still on board.

"I just have to take Baniva to see her family," he lied again. "Stay here and I'll be back in a couple of days. Then we will find the treasure and we'll all be rich beyond our wildest dreams!"

Luis and Baniva walked for days; mile after mile after mile. Luis held the map, occasionally asking questions that would help him win the race to El Dorado. But even for someone so strong, the rainforest journey was no picnic.



Luis: (angrily) These are such thick, tall plants with huge, spiky spikes. It's impossible to walk. Ow! Wouldn't we be quicker in the water?

Baniva: (concerned) Be careful, the river has piranha fish. Piranha means "tooth fish". Their jaw bones are so strong, they can devour a human hand in 5-10 seconds.

Luis: We'll stay in the rainforest then. It'll be safer.

Baniva glances at Luis, worried that she might make him even angrier.

Baniva: Perhaps.

Luis: Perhaps?

Baniva: Well, close to the river there are anacondas.

Luis turns to her quickly with a frightened expression on his face.

Luis: Anacondas?

Baniva: (smiling but trying to keep it discreet) An anaconda is a giant snake. It will wrap its body around you and squeeze until you die from suffocation. It then dislocates its jaw and swallows you whole.

Luis: Hmm... (pausing for a few seconds and looking straight at Baniva). Remind me never to invite you on a trip again. So, in the river, instant death by piranha. Next to the river, anacondas strangle and eat you. Let's go inland.. I think.



More days. More miles. Each step had Baniva believing she was nearing home. Each step had Luis believing he was nearing victory. The Amazon rainforest was now behind them. They strode north through Colombia until, finally, Luis realised that they were within a mile of victory. A hill rose in the distance. He checked the map again.

“That must be it!” he declared ecstatically.

Baniva smiled with joy and tears streaming down her face. She had waited many years for this moment and now it had finally come... or so she thought.

“Bring it on,” Luis whispered under his breath. “Soon, the whole world will know my name. Luis Jimenez, the richest and most powerful man in all the world.”

Captured

A lone in the dingy prison cell inside Barbarossa's pirate ship, Solomon heard the key turn in the lock. Someone had arrived at the door with the hush of a floating cloud. Solomon did not move his body. His eyes and ears were on red alert yet his body remained in the same position, sat on the floor facing

the door, knees to his chest, arms around his knees. He didn't blink, he didn't speak.

The heavy, wooden door creaked open with a slowness that suggested extreme caution. Squinting, a head peered around it avoiding the pale sunlight squeezing through the tiny window. A small person, the size of a young boy, entered Solomon's cell. The person put a finger to a closed mouth and beckoned Solomon to stand and follow. He did. Deep in the belly of the ship, it was even darker than his cell. Ten paces away, a candle flickered its last flames on a table full of nautical maps. Solomon tip-toed after the barefooted person, past a cabin full of snoring pirates, up a wooden ladder, past the empty galley kitchen and through the food storeroom when the person suddenly stopped, turned and faced Solomon. The finger returned to the closed mouth and Solomon suddenly realised that the mouth belonged to a young woman. She was black-skinned with large, brown eyes full of intense, piercing concentration.

Finally, they were up on deck. It was early: the morning sunlight was sneaking its way through the distant trees and onto a rocky headland surrounded by sand and silence. Using a rope, they carefully lowered themselves from the ship into the clear, Caribbean water. It was twenty strokes to the trees. Twenty strokes to a hiding place. Twenty strokes to the beginning of freedom.



Later that day, somewhere in the Colombian bush, Solomon, who was by this time starving, was treated to a meal like nothing he had ever experienced before. “Blampoopernickle! I never knew slugs could taste so good.” Slug juice oozed from Solomon’s mouth and dripped down his chin. “Absolutely delicious, I love the crunchy head. I can’t get enough of it. And when you suck the eyes, they taste like toffee. Yum! Well done Bioho!”

Bioho was the name of Solomon’s liberator. She pushed her slug to one side. She was inconsolable, sitting in the dirt, lost in a jungle far from home. Solomon tried to revive her spirits again. “Cheer up, I have something to show you that will help us find where we are.”

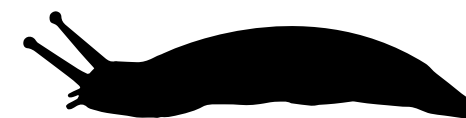
Solomon produced the map given to him by Columbus. Excited, animated, obsessed, he told her the story of Columbus’ challenge, about Luis, about El Dorado and about being being drugged and imprisoned by the notorious pirate, Barbarossa. In return, Solomon asked Bioho her story. How had she found herself on the same ship, thousands of miles from home?

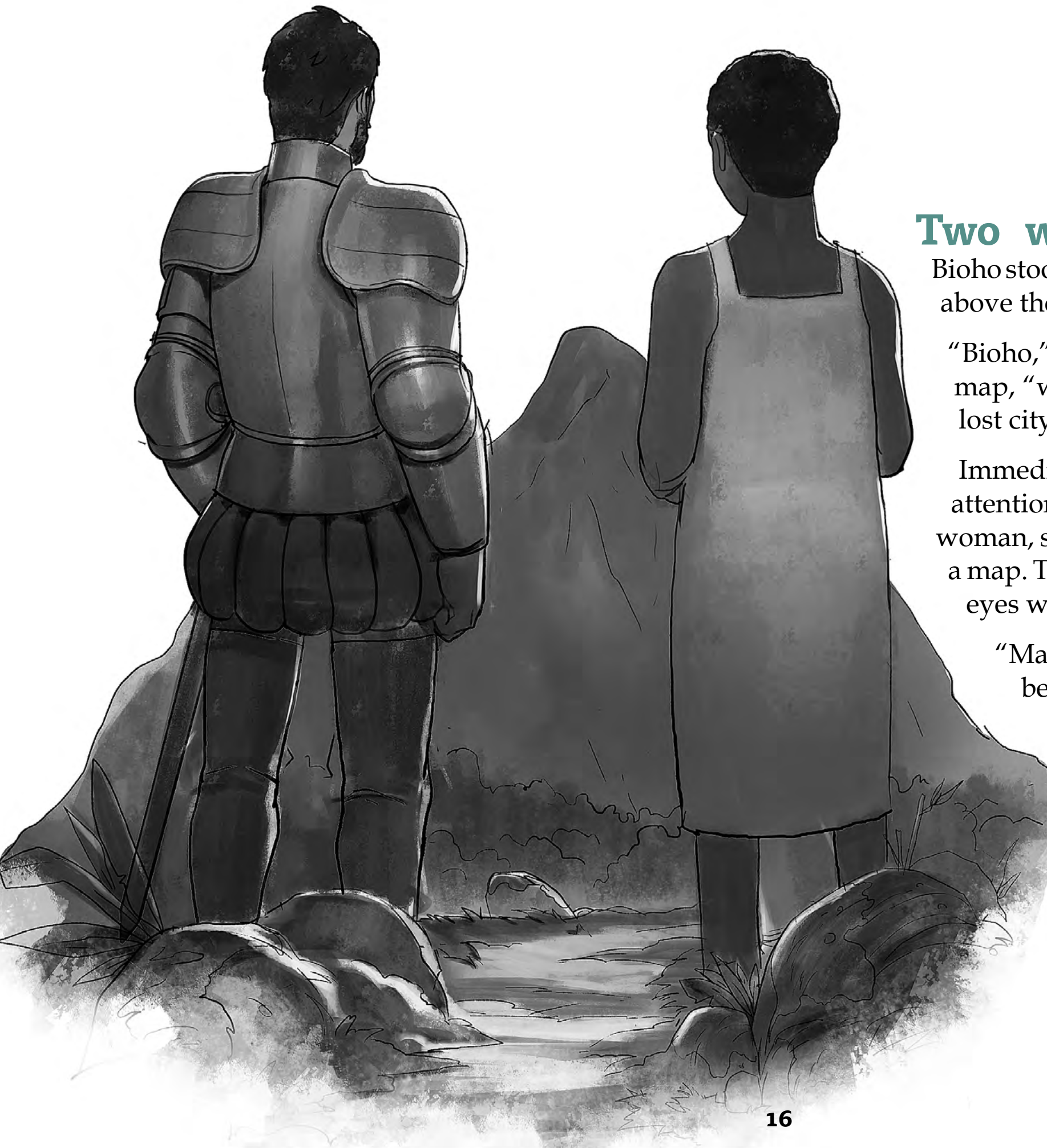
Bioho took a deep breath and began with teary eyes. “The same Barbarossa who tricked you captured my entire village and sold us to a slave trader.” She

painfully recounted how more than two hundred of her people were herded like cattle into the hold of a large ship, placed side by side and locked into position by chains with no space to move and no room to stand. “I wished I was dead,” she admitted. “I just had to sit and watch my people suffer. The woman sat next to me was terribly ill. She could not eat, she could not drink. She just stopped living. I counted forty one nights,” she said. “Forty one nights of being chained to a wooden bench. Forty one nights of tears.”

Solomon heard about the dead bodies being thrown overboard into the ocean. He heard that Bioho, who was the princess of her tribe, constantly talked to her people and tried to keep them alive by praying to their gods. It was a desperate tale of woe which shocked Solomon to his core.

“Come with me to El Dorado.” Solomon said. “I will look after you. Our nightmare is over now and we can both now begin to live again.”





Two weeks later, Solomon and Bioho stood staring at a hill rising majestically above them.

“Bioho,” Solomon whispered checking his map, “we’ve only gone and made it to the lost city of gold!”

Immediately, something else caught his attention. Two other people, a man and woman, stood directly to his right, staring at a map. The man turned his head and locked eyes with Solomon.

“Maroon gumbat feathers, I don’t believe it!” spluttered Solomon.

“You’ll never beat me, Clegg!” bellowed the man... in a Spanish accent.

The City of Gold



"**B**low me down, it's Luis! Quick!" Solomon yelled as the powerful Spaniard kicked into top gear.

"Run like the wind," Solomon puffed, "on a very windy day!"

By the time he had finished his sentence, Bioho was already thirty metres in front of him. She was incredibly quick off the mark. Gradually, Solomon began to catch her up, his lungs burning like a red-hot furnace.

"Gad.....zooks," he gasped, "this girl....can.....run...fast."



Luis was just behind, relentlessly pounding his gigantic feet into the ground. Baniva, who was beginning to realise she may have been tricked but thought that now might not be a good time to ask questions, was keeping pace too. All four were now separated by only a few measly metres. The slope became steeper, the runners ran harder, the top of the hill approaching ever closer towards them. Whoever reached the summit first would be the winner. El Dorado was within reach and Solomon was leading Luis. Thousands of miles had been travelled and it was all coming down to this.

Try as he might, Luis simply couldn't gain ground. In a desperate, last ditch attempt to win, he flung himself forwards, full length, grabbing at Solomon's ankles. At that exact moment, Solomon dodged a humongous heap of horse manure. Roaring like a lion, Luis stretched, grabbed and missed Solomon, landing face first in the stink!

Exhausted, Solomon stood wheezing at the top of the hill, the winner. Luis looked up at him, slowly wiping his face. Baniva moved towards him. With a heart full of bitterness, he turned to face the direction he had come from.

"Don't come near me!" growled Luis.

All three watched until he had trudged out of sight. Solomon turned triumphantly to claim his prize... and froze, his jaw almost hitting the floor.

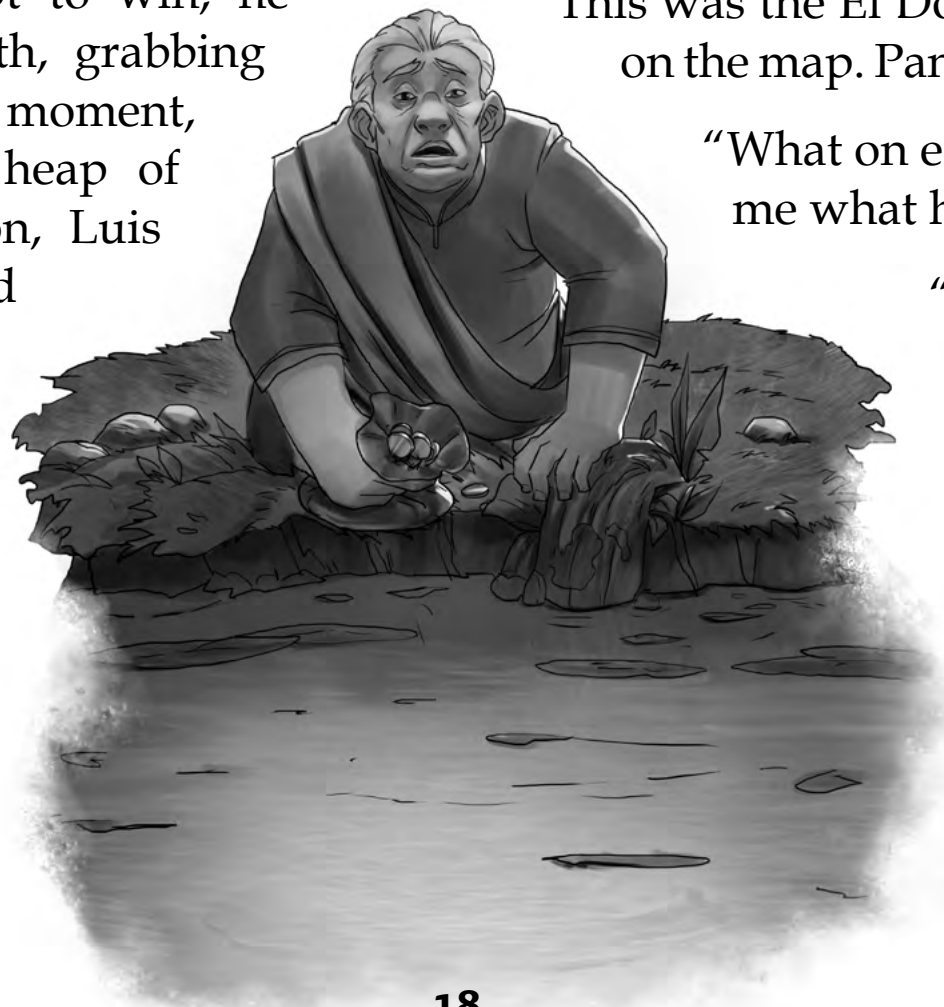
Solomon was gutted: there were no glistening avenues. There were no gilded houses. There were no golden treasures at all. There was just a lake. A great, big, blue, wet lake. Kneeling at the water's edge, an old man was throwing things into the stillness. Solomon checked the map. He checked it again. He scampered to a new lookout point, then another and another. He stopped. He stared at the sun. He checked a final time. This was definitely it. This was the El Dorado that Columbus had marked on the map. Panicking, he ran over to the old man.

"What on earth has happened? I beg you, tell me what has happened to the city of gold?"

"I am afraid to tell you, my friend, that there is no city of gold."

"What? But this is El Dorado. I came here especially to find gold. Christopher Columbus told me all about it."

The old man smiled kindly and introduced himself as the chief of the local tribe.



“There is no place called El Dorado, my friend. It is a myth that greedy Europeans, desperate for wealth, have invented. We do have some gold, it is true, but we throw it into this lake.”

For the second time, Solomon’s jaw dropped open like the drawbridge of a castle. “Into this lake?” he croaked.

“Yes, right here. Lake Guatavita,” nodded the chief still smiling. “It is an offering to our God. The Sun God. The gold shines like Him.”

Solomon, for once, was speechless.

Solomon, Bioho and Baniva were invited to stay with the tribe leader and his people, the Muisca, until they had recovered from their exhausting adventures. It didn’t take long for Solomon to understand that Europeans and South Americans had completely opposite uses for gold. For Europeans, gold was worth a lot of money and having it made you rich and powerful. For the Muisca, it was simply a shiny metal that could be used as an offering to their sun god.

At the end of the fourth day, batteries fully recharged, Solomon, Bioho and Baniva said goodbye to the Muisca tribe and beautiful Lake Guatavita. Solomon was disappointed that El Dorado wasn’t real but he had made lots of new friends, especially the two

companions with whom he was now embarking on the long journey back to Cartagena.

“Shame about the loot, but what an absolute ripsnorter of an adventure! Once we hit Cartagena, I say we rescue the Jolly Flobbers and Bioho’s friends from that scurvy dog Barbarossa and take everyone back home. We can drop you off on that Caribbean island you were taken from too, Baniva!”.

The three friends, arm in arm, laughed raucously, talking about how good it would feel to be home, at long last, as they walked into the crimson, fading sunset.

If this was the end, if we could leave our heroes walking happily into the sunset, then we would have an extremely happy ending. . A warm, fuzzy, ‘well done to the good guys’ kind of an ending...but this isn’t quite the end. Something else was happening...



It took eight days but Luis Jimenez made his way back through the rainforest to his ship.

“Vamos, amigos,” shouted Jimenez, his band of rogues gathering round him. “We are going to the city of gold. We are going to El Dorado. We’ll return with gold statues, gold crowns, gold shoes and gold teeth. We’ll be rich beyond our wildest dreams! Vamos!”

The oath he had sworn to Columbus, for the loser of the race never to return to El Dorado, was about to be broken. He was going back to take everything by force. He was going to ransack an entire city of gold.

For three days and nights, Luis and his men trampled furiously through the rainforest at devastating speed. Finally, they arrived at Lake Guatavita, sweaty, greedy and terribly confused at the lack of gold to be seen.

Luis shouted impatiently at an old man who was throwing shiny trinkets into the lake. “Where is he? The Englishman? Where is the gold?”

“The Englishman left about a week ago,” the chief replied calmly. “There is no gold”.

He tried to continue and to offer the same explanation he had given to Solomon. Luis, however, wasn’t listening. He had already turned and was marching away, yelling as he went, all the way back to the Amazon, all the way back to his ship. He never was one for listening.

“AAAAARRRRRRGGGGGGHHHHHHH!” he screamed as loud as a hippopotamus with toothache.

“That vermin Clegg. I curse you! How dare you steal the gold! All the gold! May the fleas of a thousand donkeys infest your armpits! I will have my revenge Clegg, that much I promise. I will have my revenge!

I CURSE YOUR NAME AND ALL WHO COME AFTER YOU!”

.....

Many years later, Jimenez was heard muttering the same words on his deathbed.



EL DORADO

The year is 1506. After receiving a letter from the legendary Christopher Columbus, two bold adventurers go head to head in a race to find "El Dorado", the city of gold. Solomon Clegg and Luis Jimenez sail to South America in the quest for glory taking on the dastardly pirates of the Caribbean and the might of the Amazon.

Who will reach the city of gold first? What will they find when they get there? How will the adventure end?

**Written by John Roberts
Illustrations by NerdieSid**

